DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 212 975 CS 006 483

AUTHOR Nelson, Robert L.
TITLE Love for/and Reading.
PUB DATE May 81
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Reading Association (26th, New Orleans, LA, April 27-May 1, 1981). Original document marginally legible.

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Elementary Secondary Education; Higher Education; *Reading Attitudes; *Reading Instruction; *Student Attitudes; *Teacher Role; Teaching Methods

ABSTRACT

Children are taught to read in a number of ways, are helped by reading specialists, tutors, parents, and peers, and are provided with a variety of materials designed to meet their needs and interests. Yet many children grow up with not only a dislike for reading, but a fear of it. It is not enough for teachers to develop reading skills in their students, they must endeavor to develop in them a love for reading that will last throughout their lives. Teachers who wish to promote positive reading attitudes in their students might consider these suggestions: (1) rather than force reading, make it so attractive it cannot be resisted; (2) do not fragment reading, but rather allow students to discover the beauty of language while reading whole passages; (3) share readings orally with students; (4) allow time for reading in class; (5) eliminate fear of reading by accepting errors as a natural part of life; (6) provide a variety of reading materials; (7) do not stigmatize poor readers; (8) believe in students and expect them to succeed; and (9) listen to what students have to say. Schools have too often become cold, formal, and inhumane places. Only when they become warm, relatively informal, and caring places will they produce love and reading as partners. (FL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

ED212975

Robert L. Nelson, Ph.D.
University of Wisconsin - LaCrosse
6A Wilder Hall
LaCrosse, Wis. 54601

"Love for/and Reading"
International Reading Association Convention
New Orleans, Louisiana
May 1, 1981

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Robert L. Nelson
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CS006483

BEST AVAILABLE COPY

Love for/and Reading

"The reading problems must have started when I was very young. I can't count the number of recesses I've missed because I was a poor reader. The thing I remember most was reading aloud in class. The worst possible thing that could happen to me was to be called on to read in class. It was as though somebody had grabbed me by the throat. I couldn't seem to get the words out right no matter how hard I tried. Another thing I remember was the stars. The better your reading the more silver or gold stars you got. As I recall I ended up with a lot of green ones!"

Children learn to read in many ways today, whether it be through basal texts, language experience, individualization, and phonics, or colors and codes, special alphabets and modes. They read in all sorts of places; at desks and tables, in bath tubs and stables, on carpets and chairs, at home and at fairs. They're helped by specialists and tutors, parents and peers, and yet some still have fears about reading.

After having taught reading in elementary school, secondary school and to adults, I now face the task of helping college students better their reading. It is amazing how many of my students have gotten all the way to the university with negative attitudes toward reading. Many fear reading, as indicated in the passage I read at

the beginning of this talk. These words were written by one of my college students as part of an assignment that I give every semester, an assignment that asks them to analyze their personal reading situations. Many similar papers have made me realize how important it is to try to get my students to develop a true love for reading, because if they don't, reading will forever remain a CHORE to be avoided not a task to be SAVORED.

Based upon my experiences working with secondary, college, and adult students and the many suggestions concerning reading that they have shared with me, I would like to propose the following points, which I feel are essential to the fostering of a true attachment toward reading.

1. You don't force reading upon a student anymore than you force food down a child's throat. I well remember an experience my son had when he was in first grade. One day he didn't quite finish all the food on his cafeteria tray. The lunch room supervisor consequently would not allow him to leave until every last pea was eaten. Well, he finished, but shortly thereafter in the hallway regurgitated what he had forced down. It is nonsense to expect every student to eat the same amount of food and the same kinds of food. It is just as silly to expect every student to read the same number of pages and the very same pages.

A former student of mine discussed what can happen when too much forcing takes place. He wrote --

In my grade school years I was an "A"

> student in math, science, and phy ed. In reading class I was a C- student. I hated to read. My first, second and third grade teachers made it difficult on me because I was good in all other studies but not reading. They expected me to do better. Whether it was my fault or theirs or both, I couldn't do better. Since then I have always avoided extra reading.
>
> In junior high school and senior high school I did seven book reports on the same book. I never even read the book completely, but the first report was an "A". From then on, I used the same report with small changes. For other book reports I found people I knew who had read influential books (i.e. War and Peace, Clockwork Orange, etc.) They gave me a rough summary and I wrote a report from there. The grades ranged from a "C+" to an "A-".
>
> My reading habits are beginning to get better and better since I left school in June of '79. I've subscribed to five different magazines and usually pick up more when I grocery shop. I read the daily newspaper when I can. I enjoy writing, but I still despise reading for school.

Emily Ann Smith, onetime professor of English at Berea College, Ky. put it well when she said --

> I've learned a lot from dogs. Years ago, I forced a daily spoonful of codliver oil down the throat of my German shepherd puppy. The dog slipped from my grasp one day, spilling the potion. Then he began licking the spoon. He liked the oil, but not my method of giving it to him.
>
> I've often put that over into teaching. What the teacher has, maybe the student wants, if you just give it to him the right way.

It is the instructor's job to set the cafeteria table with lots of books and to help the students choose a well-balanced reading menu, but it is not his job to ram the materials down their throats.

2. You don't fragment reading. Many teachers tear reading into so many small parts that students never do see

the whole picture. I remember a high school class I had where we spent a whole semester on Hamlet. We tore that play apart paragraph by paragraph, sentence by sentence, and word by word. I never really did enjoy Hamlet. Too many reading teachers seem afraid to have their students miss a word, any word in what they are reading. They seem more concerned about words and syllables than they do about meaning.

So let's let students see the whole picture of what they're reading. Let's stop tearing everything into bits. Help them see the beauty of language, how it flows in rhythmical patterns.

3. You share readings orally with students. I have read to my children, I have read to my pupils in elementary and secondary schools, and I share readings with my college students. I usually take a couple of minutes at the beginning of each period to read a poem or short quote or a piece from a book, magazine, or newspaper. Obviously what is read should be appropriate for the group. I have found that college students especially like to hear things about philosophy of life and nature and ecology. In fact, feedback received from my students indicates that the readings I share are one of the most popular aspects of the course. What better way to show students the joys of reading than by exposing them to the variety of fascinating things one can learn from the printed word. Many of the pieces I have read were given to me by my

students. Often these poems and stories have been carried by them in purses, bags, and wallets for long periods of time.

Let me share three with you now.

Next Spring
by
Ken Walsh

"Come next spring," said David,
"We'll climb those hills together."
He was my friend, and --
Those were his last words to me.
Next spring came, but not David.
He was killed in a car accident.
Too often we wait for spring.

The heavens beyond are great
and wonderful.
But greater yet and more wonderful
are the heavens within you.
It is these Edens that await
the Divine worker.

by:
C.V. Dwan Nair

Be Yourself
by
E. E. Cummings

To be nobody but yourself
In a world which is doing its best
day and night
To make you everybody else
Means to fight the hardest battle
Which any human being can fight
and never stop fighting.

4. You allow time for reading. How can we expect anyone to enjoy reading if no time is allowed? We have filled our schools with so many activities that often reading time comes out on the short end. I am happy to see that many schools now have S.S.R. periods or other free

times for reading. In college there is seldom such a time, so students have to learn to block time into their schedules when they read strictly for pleasure. One of my students put it so clearly when she said, "I've always thought of reading as something that has to be done, sure, some of it is, but there is so much to find out from just reading for the heck of it." But time is needed to read for the "heck of it". Another student said, "When growing up teachers hardly ever gave you leisure time to read books of your choice. Reading was something you did because it was required of you."

So let's give students time to read.

5. You eliminate fear of reading. Where did we ever get the idea that it is wrong to be wrong? Since when is man perfect? So many teachers frighten students into silence! I could give you dozens of horror stories of how teachers turn reading into a time of fear. Let me quote a couple.

> I can remember my third grade year and how we used to break into groups and read for the teacher. This was definitely not my favorite time of day. I remember how my hands used to begin to sweat and my knees would begin to shake. Although I wasn't really a poor reader, I did have a phobia of reading in front of a group. I don't remember any specific reasons why this may have come about, but I know even today I have an awful fear of speaking in front of a group of people. I think I began to associate speaking with reading and therefore began to dread reading. In sixth grade we had something called SRA, where we were graded on how many levels we moved. I had a difficult time keeping up with my friends, and the pressure

> that it caused may have made me dislike reading even more. In high school I very rarely went to the library to read. My lack of reading in high school has led to my greatest weakness in reading I believe.
>
> In school I was put into those little reading groups. We had the usual three groups, the good, fair, and poor readers. I was usually in the middle group. I wasn't too crazy about this set up. If you missed a word or you were a slow reader, you were always made fun of. That always discouraged me from reading out loud.
> When I reached the fourth grade I had a teacher who would take a book and smash it in your face if you repeatedly missed a word. This, needless to say, really scared me. It was more of an embarrassment than anything else. The experience of watching her do this to other students was enough for me to really push myself to do good. I never got a book pushed in my face, but I still get a little nervous when I have to read out loud.

Be willing to accept honest mistakes. None of us is perfect or we wouldn't be here.

6. Use a variety of materials. Some teachers think that the use of prepared kits constitutes variety. Nonsense -- use all kinds of printed matter -- books, magazines, newspapers, pamphlets, brochures, time schedules, you name it. Give students freedom of choice. Help them to see that reading means more than reading the textbooks with which they are surrounded.

A student who was brought up on kits stated how she felt about the materials she was exposed to.

> I liked the whole idea of being able to learn so much from reading at my own pace rather than having to patiently listen to it being told to me. We worked with a program of SRA, which I can't really say

> exactly what it stands for, but I would guess that it's something like student reading ability. The set-up of the SRA was in categories named by colors. It started out with the basic colors such as red and blue or yellow. Then as you progressed, you worked through the much more appealing - sounding sections of tan, or aqua and ultimately silver and gold. You could tell at a glance which section a person was in because the cards which the readings and their comprehensive questions were on had a strip of that color on the top. (The added "publicity" need not become a part of such an individualized reading program.)

7. You show your love and concern for reading and students. This means you must like to read and you must show it. Students need to see you reading. You must also show concern for students by being compassionate and kind. Elihu Burritt said and I quote, "...There is no one thing love so much needs as a kind voice, to tell what it means and feels; and it is hard to get and keep the right tone: ... A kind voice is to the heart what light is to the eye: It is a light that sings as well as shines."

We don't need the type of kindness described by another of my former students. She wrote --

> When I was in sixth grade I had to stay after one day for this old lady (who wore white high socks and tennis shoes with a dress). I was staying after to do my reading but I wanted to look at my math book for a second. So I turned towards the aisle and had the book open on my lap. She surprised me by coming behind me and she grabbed the book, slammed it and slapped my legs with it. I couldn't hold it in and I started crying. When I was leaving she put her arm around me and said, "Bye, honey." It made me ill!

Being strict does not mean you can't be kind. Obviously one teacher didn't understand this as this next statement illustrates.

> I think I am a poor reader because of my grade school years. When I was in grade school my teachers were very strict. Every time a student would miss a word or pronounce it wrong, the teacher would tease the student in front of the other fellow classmates making the individual feel silly. I was often one of these silly people, who soon found it easier to stay quiet. I also avoided reading because I thought of it as a big chore.

These are really terrible stories. We'll never get students to enjoy reading with such tactics. Teachers need to be readers themselves, they need to be empathizers.

8. You don't stigmatize the poorer readers. How often have students been singled out in front of the whole class with a statement like, "James, it's time for remedial reading class." We have attached such negative labels to poor readers that they are absolutely ashamed to read. Older students are especially concerned about being identified as poor readers, especially by their peers. Another of my former students clearly illustrates this point. She wrote --

> I was also in a reading class throughout grade school, which consisted of males besides myself. At that time in life, it was very hard for me to feel relaxed in that kind of situation. The classroom was away from the other rooms. The room, that faced the playground, always had a lot of activity going on right outside the windows, making my classmates and me jealous. I was also looked down upon from other classmates who didn't attend or who had a different book. If I did have a class with the other students, we were isolated by ourselves in a corner and we always considered ourselves as "the dummies."

We must help students without embarrassing them, no matter what level they are at.

9. You believe in students and expect them to succeed.

One of the quickest ways to lose student rapport is to show that you don't trust them. "Mary, where is your assignment? I suppose you didn't complete it." Why do we do these things? Does authority go to teachers' heads as it seems to with government leaders? A little trust can go an awful long ways. One student once said to me, "We wouldn't try anything on you, Mr. Nelson. You trust us. We'd be ashamed to try anything."

Then too we need to show students that we expect them to succeed. If you show in any way that you think they can't do the job, they probably won't. It's amazing what a proper attitude and motivation can do for a person. A young male student illustrated this clearly when he told about his experiences with reading groups.

> As I entered first grade my parents were hopeful I would succeed as I had tested extremely high in the readiness test given to me in kindergarten. But my mother was skeptical, as I was young -- my birthday being July 31st. She wanted to hold me back, but the teacher encouraged her to send me to first grade. My mother insists that I would have struggled a lot less if she had followed her own intuition and enrolled me in first grade a year later.
>
> Realizing my difficulty my parents sought tutoring for me in second grade. It did seem to help somewhat. My mother reminds me how I would cry at bedtime because I was in the lowest reading group, frustrated because I just didn't measure up to my friends.
>
> In the middle of my third grade year we moved to a different school. When my new teacher asked what reading group I was in, my mother told her I was in the middle reading

> group. (Hoping a more positive attitude might help my reading.) The chance to be in the middle group made me work all the harder to improve my reading skills, and it did seem to help, because I never was moved back to the low group.

So let's believe in students and in their abilities to succeed.

My tenth and final point -- Let's listen to students and what they have to say. After all, they're the customers aren't they? They've been in schools for years. Shouldn't they know something about education? But let's make sure we really listen, not just hear. We shouldn't try to be amateur psychologists, but we can be sounding boards'.

Listening is something all of us need to practice. So many people never really listen, they barely hear, let alone listen.

"My father and I had words this morning," said a small child, "but I didn't get to use mine."

James D. White, author of Talking With a Child, says that people talk to children, not with them. We don't only do this with children!

Dr. Abraham Schmitt, author of The Art of Listening With Love, says that such listening can transform people and relationships.

"This kind of listening," he says, "can free the speaker to search deeper and deeper for a more full understanding and admiration of himself. Listening is then a great act of love at that moment, for it makes the other person more whole."

So let's learn to listen to students and to each other, with patience, with understanding, with love.

I have given what I consider ten important statements that we, as educators, need to consider if we really want our students to become readers who really do love reading. In quick summary these ten points are:

1. Don't force reading, instead make it so attractive that it can't be resisted.
2. Don't break reading into so many pieces that the student never does figure out what he has read.
3. Share readings with students.
4. Allow time for reading. If it is supposed to be so important shouldn't time be available for it?
5. Eliminate fear of reading. Accept honest errors as a natural part of life.
6. Have a variety of materials available for reading.
7. Make it obvious that you like to read and that you like to work with students.
8. Don't single out the poor readers.
9. Believe in students. Expect them to succeed.
10. Listen to students. Be an empathizer.

Schools at all levels are too often cold, formal, and often inhumane places. They should be warm, relatively informal, and brimming with concern. Only then will we have love and reading as partners.

Let me close with a quote from an excellent article by Mario D. Fantine in a recent issue of the Phi Delta Kappan. In his article entitled "Disciplined Caring," he said,

> In an article in Today's Education, noted anthropologist Ashley Montagu expressed the view that the single most important task of the

schools is to help children develop into warm, loving human beings. Love, Montagu wrote, is 'What we should be teaching in the schools, and everything else should be secondary to that.'

.....and if we are ever to guarantee peace in a world that often seems bent on self-destruction, then we must, at all costs, make our homes, our communities, our classrooms, and indeed our very nation places where compassion and responsibility for others are encouraged and rewarded, where the inborn quality of affection is developed into the practiced, lifelong value of caring.